



## *Senate Press Office*

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

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# **Sen. Rogers: Strengthening Georgia's dog fighting laws will make a difference**



Photo: Senate Press Office

***State Sen. Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock) and Gwinnett County Sheriff Butch Conway answer questions about dog fighting at a press conference at the State Capitol this morning.***

**ATLANTA** – Less than 24 hours after former Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick was sentenced to 23 months in prison on dog fighting charges, proposed legislation to strengthen Georgia's dog fighting laws will make a difference, State Sen. Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock) said this morning in a press conference at the State Capitol. Currently, the Humane Society of the United States has ranked Georgia 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation because we do not have laws against owning dogs for fighting nor do we have a law that makes it illegal to be a dog fighting spectator.

Senate Bill 16, which passed the Senate 54-0 earlier this year and awaits a vote in the House of Representatives, will strengthen Georgia's law by increasing the penalties for dog fighting and will make it illegal for a person to own, breed, purchase or transport a dog for the purpose of fighting or baiting. It also will fortify the present laws to increase prison time and fines (from \$5,000 to more than \$20,000) for those who partake in dog fighting. If the bill passes, Georgia would rank behind only New Jersey and Alabama for the nation's strongest dog fighting laws.

The *Georgia Dog Fighting Act* (SB 16), authored by Sen. Rogers, criminalizes the entire dog fighting industry – that includes training dogs, raising dogs, transporting dogs or hosting a dog-fighting event. Right now it is difficult to arrest someone who is not actively involved in dog fighting – in fact, Vick could not have been convicted in Georgia under the current law.

“Because of lack of a good law here in Georgia, we have become a haven for dog fighting,” Sen. Rogers said. “What happened in Virginia, with Michael Vick, is happening all too often in Georgia. We want to take this opportunity . . . and use this to our benefit. We now have the legislative support and public support for this legislation, and we fully expect the legislation to pass.”

Sen. Rogers said that Senate Bill 16 should be voted on by the House of Representatives in January and then will go to Governor Perdue for his signature.

Singer/songwriter Willie Nelson has taped a public service announcement supporting Sen. Rogers’ legislation saying:

“Dog fighting is against the law in Georgia, but the laws are so weak that the beautiful state of Georgia has become a haven for dog fighters from around the country. Hey, I’m Willie Nelson along with Best Friends Animal Society and I’m asking my friends and neighbors in Georgia to help close the loopholes in the state’s dog fighting laws. It’s time to end the senseless torture of man’s best friend.”

Additionally, the Georgia Sheriff’s Association has endorsed the legislation, as does Agriculture Commissioner Tommie Irvin and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, among others.

Sen. Rogers said he and others have worked hard over the past several years to perfect the legislation, and that this bill only addresses dog-on-dog fighting – it does not prohibit hunting with dogs, dog training or dog competitions. He added that the measure goes after the dog fighting industry and not legitimate dog-related activities.

“The situation involving Michael Vick is a very sad one,” Sen. Rogers said. “From all accounts he seems remorseful and recognizes his mistakes. It is my hope that Michael Vick eventually will become a champion against dog fighting.”

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Listen to the Press Conference here:

[http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2007\\_08/senate/radiostmt/rogers-dogfight.mp3](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2007_08/senate/radiostmt/rogers-dogfight.mp3)

*Sen. Chip Rogers serves as Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. He represents the 21<sup>st</sup> Senate District which includes portions of Cherokee and Cobb counties. He can be reached at his office at 404.463.1378 or by email at [chip.rogers@senate.ga.gov](mailto:chip.rogers@senate.ga.gov).*